

Africville, Halifax, Albert Rose Report, 1963

C O P Y

December 6, 1963

REPORT OF A VISIT TO HALIFAX WITH PARTICULAR RESPECT TO AFRICVILLE

November 24-26, 1963

To: His Worship the Mayor and
Members of City Council.

From: Dr. Albert Rose,
Professor of Social Work,
University of Toronto.

Terms of Reference

On September 6, 1963, the Halifax Advisory Committee on Human Rights submitted a Brief to City Council in which the following recommendation appeared (P.2):

"The Committee has concluded, in view of its numerous meetings and consultations, that

- (1) the complexity of property tenure in Africville,
- (2) the strong sense of community in Africville,
- (3) the probable high cost of relocation arrangements likely to be acceptable mutually to Africville residents and the City of Halifax, and the apparent need for special financial arrangements, and
- (4) the depressed condition of housing in Africville,

would warrant the City's taking extraordinary measures.

The Committee recommends, therefore, that City Council engage a person of outstanding qualifications, in training and experience, to study Africville in depth and for the purpose of formulating specific recommendations of sound ways and means of solving problems in housing.

The Committee advises that, as a first step towards implementing its recommendation, City Council bring to Halifax a specialist who would be requested (after a preliminary survey of Africville, and discussion with City staff, with the Halifax Advisory Committee on Human Rights, and with other resources) to state whether, in his judgment, a study in depth is indicated."

The Committee further recommended that this writer be the specific specialist invited to visit Halifax and "to state whether, in his judgment, a study in depth is indicated."

Implementation

Mr. P. F. C. Byars, City Manager, extended the appropriate invitation on September 16, 1963, but first the responsibilities of the writer at the University of Toronto and later, the responsibilities of Mr. Byars and his staff, delayed the fulfillment of this undertaking until late November. In the meantime, however, I was enabled to read all the available staff reports on the situation in Africville, a number of magazine articles commenting upon this community, and the report of the Institute of Public Affairs, Dalhousie University, entitled "The Condition of the Negroes of Halifax City, Nova Scotia."

During my recent visit of some 48 hours I was able to tour the community under study and to interview or otherwise consult the following persons or groups:

Members of the Staff, City of Halifax

Mr. Peter F. C. Byars	- City Manager
Mr. Robert Grant	- Director, Development Department
Mr. George F. West	- Commissioner of Works
Dr. Edward M. Fogo	- Commissioner of Health and Welfare
Mr. H. Bond Jones	- Supervisor of Welfare

University and Community Specialists

Mr. Guy Henson)	- Institute of Public
Mr. Donald F. Maclean)	Affairs, Dalhousie University
Mr. Laurie T. Hancock	- Director, Maritime School of Social Work.
Mr. John Horricks	- Executive Secretary Welfare Council of Halifax.

Halifax Advisory Committee on Human Rights

The Halifax Advisory Committee on Human Rights convened a special meeting, attended by 13 of its members, for the purpose of considering the entire situation with the writer. This meeting, on the evening of November 25th, occupied four hours and was the most important confrontation of my visit.

The Present Situation

The community known as Africville, within the municipal boundaries of the City of Halifax, is without doubt one of the most intensively studied communities in North America. It has been the subject, in whole or in part, of articles in Macleans Magazine and the United Church Observer, of radio and television programmes, and of research studies by the Institute of Public Affairs, Dalhousie University and the graduate students of the Maritime School of Social Work, Halifax. In recent years as well, the Development Department of the City has devoted a considerable effort to the study and reporting of this community.

A great many basic facts, the fundamental data required for the re-planning of the area and the relocation of its residents, are already known. These data include: the number and composition of all resident families; the age and sex distribution of all residents; the number, nature and condition of all structures considered to fall within the community, whether residential or otherwise; the length of residence of families living in Africville, the labour force status, employment and unemployment, and approximate annual incomes for 1959; the mean age and grade of school children and their intelligence scores in a recent year; the number and proportion of resident families who claim to have a deed to property in Africville; and the preference of such families for relocation housing if and when their community is redeveloped by the City of Halifax for the purpose of creating a reservoir of industrial land.

As a result of the concern of the larger community in Halifax with the situation in Africville, the City Manager and members of civic staff have prepared a number of substantial reports concerning this community, particularly during the past eighteen months. In my view the work of the staff has been excellent and the reports are

impressive. The many difficult questions raised by the residents of Africville and by the Advisory Committee on Human Rights have been answered fully, frankly and sympathetically. (Reports dated July 23, 1962; September 11, 1962; November 26, 1962, January 23, 1963).

My meetings on November 25-26, 1963, and in particular a long and frank discussion with the Advisory Committee, have provided further important information and opinion. On the evening of November 25th, I raised three significant issues of public policy in the form of questions for consideration by this Committee, half of whom are coloured people, representatives of Africville and perhaps of the Negroes of Halifax, broadly speaking. These questions were:

1. Can a modern urban metropolis tolerate within its midst a community or grouping of dwellings which are physically and socially inadequate, not served with pure water and sewage disposal facilities?
2. Can a minority group be permitted to reconstitute itself as a segregated community at a time in our history, at a time in the social history of western industrialized urban nations, when segregation either de jure (in law) or de facto (in fact) is almost everywhere condemned?
3. Are there solutions to the immediate problem at hand which are feasible, sensible and just, and which will cause a modest, as against a massive, disruption to the families and individuals concerned?

The answers of the members of the Committee, without reference to race or colour, as individuals and as members of the group, were "No!" to the first two of these questions and an expression of hope and faith in the policies and attitudes of the people of Halifax in response to the third question.

The Major Findings of the Study Visit

1. The residents of Africville appear ready and to some extent

eager to negotiate a settlement concerning the ultimate disposition of their community.

The leaders of the community readily admit that Africville is a slum, that it should be cleared and that it would long since have been cleared if its inhabitants were of a different racial background.

2. In any negotiation the unique situation of Africville must be given special weight by the civic administration and the people of Halifax.

There is literally no community in Canada, perhaps none in North America, quite like Africville. Its long history, its special population and their employment characteristics, the years of neglect of this community by the administration of the City of Halifax, the unique importance of this settlement for all the people of Nova Scotia and for Canada, must be borne in mind by the negotiators.

These negotiations must not be diverted or subverted by the argument frequently heard by this investigator, that one or more features of a possible settlement will set a precedent. Africville will not, we trust, occur again, and its solution will not become a precedent. The settlement reached by the City of Halifax must be just and humane and its special features need not be extended to those present or future pleaders whose situation in the face of urban redevelopment will not in any real sense approximate that of the residents of Africville.

3. The expropriation of Africville and the relocation of its residents is far more than a housing problem. In essence this process is a welfare problem, not a mere problem of financial assistance but a multi-dimensional task.

This is the first time in a quarter-century of slum clearance, public housing, and redevelopment activity in North America, that the removal of a severely blighted area will take away from a large

proportion of the residents, not merely their housing and their sense of community, but their employment and means of livelihood as well (in this case, scavenging on the adjacent city rubbish disposal area.)

4. The people of Africville are not, by and large, chronically dependent upon public funds for support. They are a proud people who go to great lengths to remain independent and ask for financial assistance "as a last resort." At the present time approximately ten families only are in receipt of welfare assistance provided through the City of Halifax. The Dalhousie Study revealed one family in six headed by a female person but not all of these are "dependent families." Some male heads of families are, however, nearing retirement age and may soon have little or no income beyond the old age pension.

There is a very real danger that the dislocation attendant upon expropriation and relocation will be so disruptive of existing living patterns that many more families will require and seek public assistance. To prevent this as far as possible will require a great deal of planning by the City of Halifax and many community groups.

5. The fundamental needs of the people of Africville are housing, employment and income. A careful assessment will need to be made of the circumstances of each family.

The housing solution can be viewed as a tri-partite undertaking:

(1) There are certain families (estimated by the Development Department at 12 to 15 and by the Advisory Committee at 20 to 25 in number) who possess an acceptable deed or title to their property in Africville.

It is believed that these families will receive a sufficient amount of money as a result of the expropriation proceedings to enable them to meet the down payment requirements in the purchase of suitable older houses in the downtown area.

(2) There are certain families (estimated by the writer at 25-50 in number) who will seek admission to public housing.

Their major problem will be to maintain the payment of rent and service charges (payments to which they are not now accustomed) and to adjust to a new system of rules and regulations in publicly provided housing accommodation.

From the point of view of the community, and in the interests of these families, applicants for public housing from Africville should be distributed among new public housing projects under construction or projected for the future, in the ratio of about 20 per cent of all families in occupancy.

(3) The bulk of the families (estimated at half or more of the approximately 80 families resident in Africville) will likely arrange their own relocation housing and probably will seek rental accommodation within Halifax or elsewhere in the Province of Nova Scotia.

In the case of the latter two groups, where no clear title or acceptable evidence of ownership exists, the City has offered a flat sum of \$500 per family as a compensation, in recognition of the equity these families have in this long-standing community.

6. The related problems of employment and income are not solved by a process of relocation and compensation and cannot be met in this manner, even if compensation were increased.

Those persons from Africville who are employable must be assisted to seek and obtain employment suited to their skills and experience, if any, within the City of Halifax or its Metropolitan Area. This will require not merely the acceptance and enforcement of the Fair Employment Practices Act of the Province of Nova Scotia but more especially, a change in attitude and the sympathetic understanding of the employers, workers, consumers and general citizenry of the community.

Those persons who do not appear to possess marketable skills or experience must be assisted to obtain vocational guidance, counselling and, if possible, training or retraining.

7. The residents of Africville are seeking, therefore, a system of assurances or guarantees as a part of the settlement to be negotiated. Their concerns include the following:

- that the City of Halifax will guarantee the monthly rental, if necessary, for families admitted to public housing, during a period of readjustment which might be limited to six months;
- that welfare assistance will be made available without prejudice, to relocated residents of Africville as they seek to create new living patterns within the City;
- that Africville families seeking to purchase houses in Halifax will be assisted to find accommodation at a fair market price and that legal advice will be available;
- that Africville families will not be forced, through discrimination in the housing market, to seek accommodation only in those areas slated for redevelopment within the next few years;
- that the Civic Administration will seek to encourage the people of Halifax to offer employment to coloured people and to cease discrimination against those whose address is now known to be in Africville.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The writer was asked to state whether, in his judgment, a study (of Africville) in depth is indicated. It is my carefully considered view that no further research in depth is required or is likely to be helpful in the solution of the problems described in this report.

The time has come, in my view, for the City and the people of Halifax to cease the study and the debate and to formulate and promulgate clearly, a policy and a programme of social action with respect to Africville. The writer, accordingly, recommends that:

1. The City Council of Halifax enunciate a clear policy that the community of Africville will be expropriated and cleared during the period commencing April 1, 1964 (or shortly thereafter) and

that this process will be completed not later than December 31, 1966;

2. The Civic Administration enter into early negotiations with the representatives of Africville and the Advisory Committee on Human Rights, to work out the design and the staging of the clearance and relocation programme;

3. The Civic Administration encourage families to come forward voluntarily to negotiate settlements in respect of their property in Africville, whether such property is clearly owned or not;

4. The expropriation settlements recognize the special situation described in this report and that the compensation presently offered by the City to those without a deed be considered a minimum amount;

5. The compensation for this latter group be varied in accordance with size of family and/or marital status, recognizing the special needs of unmarried mothers with dependent children;

6. The Halifax Housing Authority be encouraged to admit a number of families relocated from Africville into each new housing project as it reaches completion, in the ratio of approximately one in every five families accommodated;

7. The Development Department of the City be assigned the responsibility of administering the entire relocation programme and that for this purpose a special budget be appropriated to enable:

(a) the employment of a trained social worker or social scientist to visit and document the social and economic situation and requirements of each family unit or single individual, and to recommend the order or priority of relocation; and

(b) the development of a registry of available housing for sale or for rent (outside public housing) which might be suitable for families or persons relocated from Africville; and

(c) the creation of a special relocation fund to assist families who require furniture or equipment to enable them to function properly and live decently in their new accommodation.

8. The City of Halifax provide free legal aid through its Legal Department and the enlistment of volunteers from the legal profession, to assist Africville residents to purchase homes or otherwise relocate themselves without payment of exorbitant charges, fees or other levies.

The writer will conclude this report by repeating a statement he made to the Advisory Committee on Human Rights during his recent visit to Halifax, in the following words:

"Surely the coloured man is entitled to no less and no more consideration than the white resident of an urban redevelopment area! At the same time, because his needs are greater in nature and amount (education, employment, civil rights) he should and will receive greater consideration. Yet he must make an effort to express these needs."

If the social and economic assistances recommended in this report, or similar programmes, are forthcoming and are administered with sympathy and understanding, we may look forward to a relatively smooth process of relocation and redevelopment. The alternative is a condition of chronic dependency for many of the families under study. The staff of the City of Halifax should seek the support and assistance of all community groups to forestall this unfortunate possible outcome of years of study and effort.

Respectfully submitted,

(Sgd.) Albert Rose

Dr. Albert Rose